



COMMISSIONER'S NEWSLETTER

An update from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales

FEBRUARY
2025

A MESSAGE FROM RHIAN

Happy New Year to you all! I hope you've been keeping healthy and warm over this winter period, and are looking forward to some longer, lighter days as we head into spring.

This winter period has brought with it the publication of several large-scale reports, progress on two separate roundtables, and continuous engagement with older people, organisations and stakeholders from across Wales, all of which has contributed to my goal of enabling all older people across Wales to live and age well.



This quarter, my team and I have published three large-scale reports. The first – Exploring Digital Ageism – provides a deep dive into the barriers that the ever-increasing digitalisation of our society poses to the older generation. My second report: Older People and Poverty in Wales, utilised the lived experiences of older people, alongside statistics, to reveal the challenging realities and impossible financial choices that many older people face every day. Lastly, 'Space for Everyone? Older people's perspectives on access to car parking in Wales', analyses older people's perceptions of the digitalisation of car parking payments, and compares this alongside local authority data on the payment options and systems available in the car parks they run.

I have also published a briefing paper on 'Improving responses to older people's experiences of sexual violence and abuse', summarising a roundtable event that I hosted in September 2025, which explored this topic. Additionally, in November 2025, my team and I hosted a roundtable on oral health and dentistry in Wales, as part of my commitment to examine older people's access to dentistry and oral health services.

Finally, I have been as busy as ever with engagement events, and in this quarter I had the opportunity to conduct week-long visits to Pembrokeshire and Merthyr Tydfil. These weeks provided a valuable insight into the variety of groups and activities available to older people in these areas, and gave me the opportunity to speak directly with older people, and understand the different ways they are supported to live and age well.

As always, if you need help and support with an issue you're facing, you can contact my Advice and Assistance Team on 03442 640 670 or email ask@olderpeople.wales.



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Older people at significant risk of digital ageism and social exclusion

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A report published in October by the Commissioner highlighted the significant issues and barriers faced by older people due to the growing issue of 'digital ageism', and called for action to prevent older people becoming excluded in an increasingly digital world.

The report found that digital ageism creates barriers for older people across a range of areas – from accessing health and social care services, to lifelong learning opportunities, to social participation and leisure activities – often as a result of online systems that assume digital literacy and are designed with younger users in mind.

The report also highlighted that older workers face systemic barriers relating to employment, as well as the fact that systems using Artificial Intelligence (AI) frequently embed bias against older people.

The Commissioner made a number of recommendations for the Welsh Government and public services within the report, as well as setting out the action that the technology sector and digital service designers should take to address the issues identified.

These include working in partnership with older people to co-design systems and services, creating a requirement that all publicly commissioned digital products and services meet age-inclusive accessibility and usability standards, and ensuring that digital policies account for and recognise the diversity of older people's experiences.

Discussing the report, the Commissioner said:

"Digital services and systems are playing an increasing role in our day-to-day lives, but the rapid shift towards 'digital first' is resulting in many older people being left behind.

"Older people face a range of barriers in terms of accessing and using online platforms, increasing the risk of people finding themselves first digitally then socially excluded.

"Alongside this, age-related biases are often embedded into AI and algorithms, which can lead to discrimination and poor treatments, such as reduced accuracy in healthcare diagnoses or employment practices that exclude older people.

"These issues must be rapidly addressed, both by the Welsh Government and public services in Wales, as well as the companies that are designing and developing the platforms and systems through which these are delivered."

You can read the full report here - <https://olderpeople.wales/resource/digital-ageism/> - or get in touch if you'd like a paper copy.

Commissioner's report lays bare the scale and impact of poverty amongst older people in Wales



Published in November, the Commissioner's Older people and poverty in Wales report revealed that 1 in 6 older people in Wales is now living in poverty, with certain groups affected much more severely. Many more older people also find themselves struggling due to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and rapidly rising prices, which have particularly affected individuals living on fixed incomes.

The report is based on older people's own words, captured through research and engagement, alongside the latest available data and statistics, to highlight the realities of poverty in later life.

The report highlights the impossible choices many older people are forced to make everyday – with 1 in 5 older people in Wales going without heating, and a quarter skipping meals or eating less – and the serious consequences these can have on people's health and well-being. These are especially acute during winter, when cold weather and inadequate diets contribute to significantly higher mortality rates among older people, as well as huge, avoidable costs to the NHS – estimated to be over £40million a year.

The Commissioner is calling on the Welsh and UK Governments to deliver a range of action to ensure that older people living in poverty are better supported, including tackling the Pension Credit 'cliff edge', establishing a new fund to provide support to older people who are struggling and increasing investment in energy efficiency. The Commissioner is also calling for funding for local authorities to enable them to reach out to those who may be missing out on the support they are entitled to.

The Commissioner said: "Investing in tackling poverty could unlock tens of millions of pounds that could be used to improve our public services and communities here in Wales.

"We need to see greater support for older people who are living in poverty or struggling financially, including those who do not currently qualify for other forms of support.

"In the longer term, we also need a national debate about what constitutes a sufficient income that would enable us to live and age well, which should be the starting point for creating a sustainable pension system that provides us all with adequate incomes when we retire.

"I will continue to make the case for decisive, coordinated action at both a national and local level to tackle poverty, supported by powerful evidence based on older people's lived experiences, to help create a fairer, healthier and more inclusive Wales."

You can read the full report here - <https://olderpeople.wales/resource/new-report-lays-bare-the-scale-and-impact-of-poverty-amongst-older-people-in-wales/> - or get in touch if you'd like a paper copy.

Space for Everyone? Older people's perspectives on access to car parking in Wales



Published in December, the Commissioner's 'Space for Everyone?' report highlighted the difficulties older people increasingly face when trying to park the car due to the increased use of digital and app-based payment systems.

The report is based on experiences shared by older people, as well as data provided to the Commissioner by all local authorities, which provides a snapshot of the payment options and systems available in the car parks they run.

The Commissioner's findings show that while most local authority car parks in Wales still offer a range of payment options, including cash in many cases, the perception amongst many older people that this is no longer the case is impacting on their independence, well-being and ability to take part in community life.

In addition, the potential impact on older people of removing cash payment options does not seem to have been fully recognised, with limited opportunities for older people to make their voices heard and influence decision-making processes.

Discussing her findings, the Commissioner said:

"For many older people, particularly those without a smartphone or people with limited digital skills, the increased use of and promotion of digital and app-based payment systems is creating feelings of frustration and exclusion.

"Given that around a third of people aged 75+ do not have access to the internet, and that a third of over 65s do not use a smartphone, my findings underscore the need for inclusive solutions that ensure older people are not left behind in an increasingly digital world.

"That's why I'm calling on local authorities to take a range of practical action to respond to the issues identified, including maintaining a range of payment options, and improving communication to promote the availability of non-digital payment options.

"Ensuring everyone can access services such as car parking is important to enable older people to continue to play a full part in community life and do the things that matter to them. This is central to creating age-friendly communities, places where people of all ages can live and age well, supported by inclusive design, accessible services, and strong social networks."

You can read the full report here - <https://olderpeople.wales/resource/space-for-everyone-older-peoples-perspectives-on-access-to-car-parking-in-wales/> - or get in touch if you'd like a paper copy.

Improving responses to older people's experiences of sexual violence and abuse



In September, the Commissioner brought together experts working across the public and voluntary sector to explore the actions needed to improve responses to older people's experiences of sexual violence and abuse.

Everyone who participated had direct experience of working with older people affected by sexual violence or abuse, critical to ensuring that the discussions and any decisions for action were firmly grounded in their lived experiences.

Colleagues attending the roundtable shared several examples of older people's experiences of accessing and engaging with services, and considered how these might be improved, with the insights from these discussions fundamental to identifying the 'areas for action' included within the Commissioner's briefing paper.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first focuses upon participants' perceptions of the challenges of responding effectively to older people's experiences of sexual violence or abuse. The second section highlights what needs to change from the perspectives of participants, areas for action and levers for change. The final section outlines the commitments made by the Commissioner following the roundtable.

You can read the briefing paper here - <https://olderpeople.wales/resource/improving-responses-to-older-peoples-experiences-of-sexual-violence-and-abuse/> - or get in touch if you'd like a paper copy.

Roundtable on oral health and dentistry in Wales

The Commissioner's 2025-26 Work Programme included a commitment to examine older people's access to dentistry and oral health services in Wales, as older people across Wales frequently raise issues and concerns about the difficulties they often face when trying to find dental appointments.

The Commissioner therefore convened a round table meeting on 12 November 2025, to bring together stakeholders from oral health and dentistry policy and practice, as well as stakeholders working more widely across health and social care, to explore how older people's oral health and dentistry might benefit from better integration with new community-based models of prevention, treatment and care.

You can read a summary of the roundtable here - <https://olderpeople.wales/resource/round-table-on-oral-health-and-dentistry-in-wales/> - or get in touch if you would like a paper copy.

Shaping the future of social care in Wales



There was an excellent response to the Commissioner's Future of Social Care Survey, which closed at the end of January.

Over 300 responses were received from older people across Wales, who shared their experiences of receiving help and support from social care services in a range of settings, including people's own homes, residential care homes, and community-based services such as day centres. Alongside this, in-depth telephone interviews were also conducted to gather additional information from a sample of participants.

The Commissioner wanted to hear from older people to learn more about what's currently working well and where improvements are needed, to help ensure that future services are focused on what really matters to older people.

The Commissioner and her team are currently analysing the evidence shared to identify key issues, examples of good practice and action needed to deliver any improvements required.

The Commissioner said:

“I'd like to thank everyone who took the time to respond to my Future of Social Care survey and for sharing their experiences of accessing and receiving care and support.

“Social care plays a crucial role in supporting many older people in Wales to live safely and independently, yet concerns are frequently shared with me that suggest people's experiences are falling short of the standard they should expect.

“That's why I am examining these issues in more detail, using the voices of older people as my evidence base, to identify the difficulties people are facing and identify the action needed to address these.

“I am looking forward to working with older people and key organisations across Wales to drive meaningful change and help create a social care system that empowers older people to live well, age well and stay connected, while ensuring that older people are treated with the dignity and respect that everyone has a right to.”

Meeting and speaking with older people across Wales

Over the past quarter, the Commissioner has been busy travelling across Wales, to meet and speak directly with older people, to learn more about their experiences of growing older in their local communities, as well as the issues they may be facing and the changes they would like to see. These engagement events have also provided opportunities to share helpful information and resources and provide advice and assistance on a range of matters.

In November, the Commissioner also undertook two separate week-long engagement visits, one in Pembrokeshire, and the other in Merthyr Tydfil. Both of these weeks allowed the Commissioner to attend a wide range of events, and speak with a large number of older people giving her insight into how people live their lives, the things they enjoy and value, and the actions and support that enable them to live and age well.

Everyone we visited gave the Commissioner and her team a very warm welcome, and we thank everyone who spoke to us for sharing their experiences so openly and honestly, helping us to identify common and emerging issues which guide the Commissioner's work to influence policy and practice.

We've got lots more engagement planned across Wales, but if you'd like the Commissioner to visit your group, please get in touch on 03442 640 670 or email ask@olderpeople.wales.

Here is a snapshot of the engagement events attended by the Commissioner and her team in the past quarter:

Older people's groups

- Denbighshire – Llys Awelon Extra Care Housing Scheme
- Denbighshire – Age Friendly Celebrations
- Aberdare – Fernhill 60+ Forum
- Pembrokeshire – Cofion Cynnes
- Gwynedd – Lle'n y Dre, Dolgellau
- Gwynedd - South Meirionydd Older People's Forum
- Vale of Glamorgan – Music in Mind, Cowbridge
- Neath – University of the Third Age U3A
- Vale of Glamorgan – Barry Friends and Neighbours
- Torfaen - Action for Elders, Ponthir Group
- Torfaen – U3A
- Bridgend - Porthcawl Welsh Society
- Powys - Whitton WI
- Wrexham - Rainbow Foundation Celebration Event
- Wrexham – Age Friendly Celebration Event
- Swansea - Llwchwr Shore Lunch Club



In the weeklong visits to Merthyr Tydfil and Pembrokeshire, the Commissioner visited the following groups and organisations:

Pembrokeshire

- Crymych Extra Care Day Opportunities
- Orchard Court, Johnston Sheltered Accommodation
- Haverfordwest Leisure Centre
- Cradle Choir
- VC Gallery
- Solva, St Davids and Llanrhian Age-Friendly Communities
- Saundersfoot Dementia Supportive Wednesday Club
- Hubberston and Hakin Community Centre
- Martello House
- Pembrokeshire 50+ Forum
- Strength Academy Wales
- Carew Lunch Club

Merthyr Tydfil

- Gellideg Foundation – Dementia Carers
- Pentrebach & Abercanaid Over 60's Club
- Merthyr Valley Veterans
- Ty Gurnos Newydd and Llysfaen
- Halo Leisure Centre
- Alzheimer's Society Dementia Bowls Group
- 'People Together' group, Treharris
- Merthyr Valley's Home
- Dowlais Railway Carers Group

Alongside her engagement with older people over the past few months, the Commissioner held meetings with key stakeholders including Welsh Ministers, MSs and MPs, and senior leaders of key public bodies such as Social Care Wales and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. These meetings provided opportunities for the Commissioner to raise issues and concerns, highlight older people's experiences and examine the action needed to deliver positive change.

The Commissioner's team also contributed to a wide range of stakeholder events and conferences across Wales and more widely, to shape discussions and influence policy and practice, in many cases delivering speeches or presentations or taking part in Q&A sessions as part of an expert panel. During the past quarter, these included:

- National Social Care Conference
- Welsh GP Practice Managers Conference
- Carers Rights Event at the Senedd
- NEA Cymru - Wales Fuel Poverty Conference 2025
- Age Alliance Wales Round Table meeting on prevention in health and social care
- AI in Healthcare Conference
- Public Health Wales Conference
- NHS Wales Deconditioning Summit
- Welsh NHS Confederation Health and Wellbeing Alliance

Want to find out more about our engagement with older people and stakeholders across Wales? Follow us on X / Facebook / LinkedIn or visit the Commissioner's Engagement Diary: <https://olderpeople.wales/engagement-diary/>

Spotlight On...

Our Spotlight On... section highlights useful information from other organisations, as well as opportunities to make your voice heard or get involved in upcoming projects.

Museums Inspiring Memories: Working for Dementia

At the October meeting of the Commissioner's Community of Practice group, Gareth Rees, Dementia Voice Lead at Amgueddfa Cymru, gave an update on the Museums Inspiring Memories Project:

This is a three-year partnership project (2022 – 2025) with Alzheimer's Society Cymru, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. It aims to use museums, collections and resources to support the wellbeing of people living with dementia. It has been confirmed that the project will continue until May 2026.

The project runs across seven national museums in Wales and has developed training and support packages with input from the Dementia Voice Heritage Group and collaboration with community partners.

In September 2025, the Commissioner visited Big Pit National Coal Mine, one of the participating museums, to attend a dementia-friendly tour, which included an accessible route for wheelchair users, and clear, consistent communication of each step of the visit. The museum has previously run other successful dementia-friendly services, such as Caffi Mine, which gave visitors the opportunity to reminisce and chat about the industrial heritage of South Wales.

The project provides a safe space for those living with dementia to connect and learn more about local history, and to talk about their memories of growing up within these communities.

For more information on the Museums Inspiring Memories project, please visit - <https://museum.wales/wellbeing/museums-inspiring-memories-working-for-dementia/>

The logo for Amgueddfa Cymru (National Museum Wales) is displayed on a red background. The text 'AMGUEDdfa' is on the top line and 'CYMRU' is on the bottom line, both in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

AMGUEDdfa
CYMRU

Building Stronger Futures for Older Veterans

Heidi Holland, from Building Stronger Futures for Older Veterans, also gave a valuable presentation to members of the Commissioner's Community of Practice Group, highlighting a new training course designed to address the unique challenges faced by older veterans:

As of 2025, there are approximately 650,000 military veterans over the age of 80 in the UK. The course aims to raise awareness among frontline staff in the NHS, local authorities, and voluntary sectors about the specific needs and best methods of support for older veterans. The course is concise and requires just 30-45 minutes to complete and is available in both English and Welsh.



Developed in Wales with a UK-wide reach, the course aims to create a consistent approach to veteran care. It will help professionals better understand and support older veterans at a local level. As a preventative training model, it focuses on reducing hospital readmissions by fostering stronger community connections.

The anticipated outcomes of this initiative include a unified UK-wide approach to veteran care. By ensuring that all veterans who enter NHS, local authority, or third-sector care are identified, have a veteran's medical marker placed on their records, and are offered connections to local veteran support networks, the course seeks to strengthen support systems. This will lead to increased personal connections within communities, helping to reduce isolation and loneliness.

For further information, please visit - <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/dyfed/about-us/news/articles/2021/building-stronger-futures-for-older-veterans-just-got-even-stronger/>

Our Newsletter

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to any colleagues or contacts that you think would be interested in receiving it. Please contact us if you would like to be removed from our newsletter distribution list. You can also [unsubscribe here](#).

Your comments, feedback and stories

We welcome your feedback about our newsletter so please feel free to contact us to share any thoughts or comments that you have.

We also welcome suggestions about potential content for the newsletter, so if you have any information that you would like us to include in future editions, please get in touch.

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people across Wales.

The Commissioner is working for a Wales that leads the way in empowering older people, tackling inequality and enabling everyone to live and age well.

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